UNREAL CITY: MADNESS, DARK HUMOUR AND THE VICISSITUDES OF BEIRUT

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Résumé

Cet article examine la manière dont la folie, le désordre et les défis cliniques se manifestent dans l'expérience de Beyrouth post-guerre civile. Il analyse comment, à travers la reconstruction rapide de la ville – laquelle engendre elle-même autant de destructions que les guerres civiles – une forme de désagrégation psychique imprègne la mémoire collective libanaise, où se nouent et s'entrelacent des temporalités à la fois chroniques et aiguës. Dans le court-métrage White Noise (2017) d'Ahmad Ghossein, un jeune agent de sécurité inexpérimenté, Saïd, effectue son premier service sous le pont du Ring. Chaque rencontre avec la faune hétéroclite de la vie nocturne beyrouthine et avec les formes improvisées de sécurisation le plonge davantage dans la confusion, la dissociation, puis, finalement, dans la psychose. En se concentrant sur la figure d'Abou Rabih (un vieil homme qui se jette du Ring et échoue à répétition dans sa tentative de suicide, à son grand désespoir), l'article montre comment ce personnage, apparemment secondaire, se révèle pourtant hautement emblématique du propos central du film. Fulminant contre Beyrouth et le Liban, qu'il juge si profondément brisés qu'ils ne lui permettent même pas de mettre fin à ses jours, il cristallise une critique radicale de l'état du réel. L'article explore ainsi la manière dont protagoniste et ville se confondent : les mécanismes dysfonctionnels de l'un comme de l'autre, tout comme la violence qui les traverse, produisent une forme troublante d'irréalité, dont la résolution ne peut advenir que dans l'imaginaire – à travers la destruction exorbitante, et pourtant comique, du pont – ouvrant ainsi sur un nouveau champ épistémique.

Mots-clés

Folie – Mémoire – Beyrouth – Suicide – Humour noir

Abstract

This article examines how madness, disorder and clinical challenges are encountered when interacting with post-civil war Beirut. It looks at how through the rapid rebuilding of the city, itself engendering as much destruction as the civil wars themselves, a form of psychic disarray infuses Lebanese collective memory as chronic and acute timestreams intertwine. In Ahmad Ghossein's short film *White Noise* (2017), a hapless rookie security guard, Said spends his first shift under the Ring bridge and each encounter with the motley crew of Beirut's nightlife and improvised securitisation sends him further into confusion, dissociation and eventually psychosis. By focusing on how the character, Abu Rabih, an elderly man who jumps from the Ring and fails in his suicide attempt repeatedly much to his consternation, is a seemingly incidental figure yet highly illustrative of the film's core message, as he rails against Beirut and Lebanon as it so broken that it does not even permit him to take his own life. This article explores how protagonist and city fuse: the dysfunctional mechanisms of both city and violence drive a form of disturbing unreality resolved only in the imaginary, exorbitant—and funny—destruction of the bridge mapping out a new epistemic field.

Keywords

Madness – Memory – Beirut – Suicide – Dark humour.

Estragon (*Looking at the tree*.) Pity we haven't got a bit of rope.
Vladimir Come on. It's cold.
He draws **Estragon** *after him. As before.*
Estragon Remind me to bring a bit of rope tomorrow
Beckett, S. (2010). *Waiting for Godot* (p. 50). London: Faber and Faber

Introduction

Dark humour takes place in and defines a contrary epistemic field; it looks to incongruity, absurdity, irony, as a means of disclosing the unspeakable. It borders a fine line with malevolent gestures of mocking or laughing at tragic circumstances and can been found to correlate with personality traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy, known as the dark triad (Dionigi *et al*., 2021). Yet dark humour can, in a benevolent formulation, help to diffuse emotions, achieve a shift in cognitive perception and relieve tensions. A study undertaken by Aram Kim *et al*. (2024) identifies incidences of dark humour among people working clinical psychiatry "as a mechanism to release tensions in incongruous situations, to lighten the tone of the crisis and to cope with the burden of work" (2024, 69). The discussion demonstrates that dark humour worked best at avoiding offence when used between colleagues and was only very rarely suitable with patients (2024, 71), suggesting that there needs to be a shared egalitarian positionality for the humour to be effective. As one respondent pointed out: "very occasional use of black humour provides relief and allow us to cope with truly horrible situations" (2024, 71). An anecdote in the *Nursing Standard* recalls the experience of a firefighter disclosing his diagnosis of testicular cancer to his "watch" (crew) and their immediate response being one of hilarity suggesting that his excised testicle could be replaced by a squeaky toy or more usefully, in a smoke-filled environment, a glow-in-the-dark dongle. (Newham 2024, 27). It is no coincidence that these adaptive moments of dark humour take place in highly charged and emotionally challenging workplaces such as the emergency services and healthcare settings (Petrie *et al*., 2023a; Petrie *et al*., 2023b). As an adaptive strategy dark humour can allow a creatively tonic response to the witnessing of suffering, enabling people to reflect on paradoxical situations and contain ambiguity as well as bringing light into the darkest times and places (Kim, 2024, 72). It is in thinking through this symbiotic juxtaposition of dark humour, crisis and madness with the generative urban space of Beirut, that my article reads a short film directed by Ahmad Ghossein, *White Noise* (2017).

1. Continuous and Compounding Trauma

Psychosocial conditions in Lebanon remain perilous, the emotional support organisation, Embrace, reported a 21.7% annual increase in the suicide rate in 2023 (Feb 2024). Tamara Saade (2025) recently explored the temporal continuity of trauma, quoting psychologist Myra Saad, who explains that typical frames of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) where there is a rupture created by the trauma and a resumption of safety in its aftermath cannot apply in Lebanon because circumstances preclude the therapeutic device of offering the reassurance of renewed safety; instead it creates a psychic state of persistent anxiety and insecurity because safety is always potentially jeopardised. Psychologists in South Africa analysing the effects of apartheid established and examined the concept of Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) both attesting to the persistent temporality and divesting the symptoms that result from any sense of disorder (Stevens *et al*., 2013). This continuity is both overlaid and punctuated by singular traumatic events such as the port explosion of August 2020. The fissure opened by the catastrophic event, as an acute temporality, is explored in the collection of essays, *Ce qui nous arrive* (2022) in response to the port explosion of 2020, speaking to the absence of any agency, events (and *les événements* has long been a euphemism for the civil war) happen to us. As Pamela Krause elaborates, "Les mots nous manquent pour dire l'imprévisible, l'unique, l'irrépétible : l'événement impose une *inépuisable herméneutique, une infinie réappropriation conceptuelle et langagière*" (2025, § 6).

Saade in conversation with Mia Atoui of Embrace, points, I think, usefully for the Lebanese context to the idea of compounded or compounding trauma (Saade, 2025). In this way the continuous frame of CTS can coalesce with the event-focused frame of PTSD, offering potential as a palimpsestic paradigm (see Silverman, 2015). Each traumatic erasure reveals latent traces of previous episodes, or a sort of traumatic sediment brought forth, often violently, into the present where, as both Atoui and film scholar, Zeina Tarraf are keen to point out there is a dialogue, if not straightforward collision, between the affective afterlives of trauma and the injustices of the present (Tarraf 2017, 39). Tarraf suggests that the intersection of postwar trauma with neoliberalism results in an affective impasse with symptoms of either depressed apathy or excessive indulgence. I suggest that there is another route too, in the adaptive dark humour discussed above. If the compounding of trauma results in scepticism and distrust of institutions, including those in a position to help, it also engenders a rather pervasive cynicism. Allied to Barthes extension of the Lazarean to the absurd (Barthes [1950] in Cayrol 2007), it opens up the potential to read dark humour as counter to Cayrol's fearful assaults of "*un regard "vide du pouvoir d'aimer'*"

(766); instead it can function instead as an adaptive yet loving, powerful yet egalitarian gaze.

Unresolved traumatic loss can be found in living with the ambiguity of those who were disappeared during the civil war underpinning a chronic temporality. This is a form of slow violence, or latency, which finds representation in forms of haunted cultural production such as the feature, *A Perfect Day* (Joreige and Hadjithomas, 2006) where the continuing absence and latent presence of his father inflects every aspect of Malek's everyday life (see Silverman, 2021; Tarraf, 2017 and Launchbury, 2014). In *Que vienne la pluie* (Hojeij, 2010), the central character, Ramez returns from his time in a Syrian prison to an unfamiliar Beirut. He is thwarted in his recovery, lost and held back in stasis. His only consolation for his continuing psychic disarray is the obsessive collection of highly decorated paper bags. Ramez here is operating as a Lazarean figure in the way that Jean Cayrol would term it: "*Il n'a de témérité que dans sa maladie, d'audace que dans son infirmité*" (Cayrol, 2007, 766). He finds solace in a deep friendship with a woman still waiting for her husband (who he knows is dead but does not disclose this) and is able then to persist in the perpetual unresolved temporal latency between stimulus and forever offset response; the 'surpassing disaster' theorised by Jalal Toufic (2009). In the first case there is no resolution possible either legally or emotionally; in the second, the long-awaited return which was supposed to solve problems merely inspires a new range of continuing difficulties for all those left behind and newly returned. In the next section I turn to Ahmad Ghossein's short film *White Noise* and explore how humour acts as a counterweight to the psychosocial frames outlined here.

2. *White Noise* dir. Ahmad Ghossein (2017)

Ahmad Ghossein's film work, he is also an artist, includes the feature *All this victory* (2019) set during the 2006 war as the culmination of a body of work where he "splashes around in the psyche" of South Lebanon (Wilson-Goldie, 2017). Playfulness and humour are woven through Ghossein's practice as a foil for the "seriousness of his purpose" Wilson-Goldie suggests. His short film, *My Father is still a communist* (2011) is a semi-autobiographical account of the absence of his father due to him working overseas in which he fantasises that he is a hero fighting for the Communist Party. It layers the cassettes his mother recorded to send to him as she and the children live through the civil war, the Israeli invasion of 1982 to form the soundtrack to frequently desolate image sequences of loneliness and responsibility. Yet, there is a counterpoint here as photos of the fatherless family are depicted with the father in the present day interloping as a figure of a middle-aged working-class man, trying to adapt to the image

with often hilarious results (Fig. 1). The father operates as an undead spectre haunting the film, the one-sided dialogue of the mother remaining unanswered and suspended. This father figure as comic misfit, I suggest, is revisited in the figure of Abu Rabih in *White Noise*.

Ghossein's 2017 short depicts the first night shift of a rookie security guard, Said, as he is on duty under the Avenue Général Fouad Chéhab (Chéhab was a reformist president from 1958-64) also known as the Ring Bridge. This location is already heavily invested with meaning. Built in the early 1960s to relieve congestion in the historic centre of Beirut, in fulfilment of long-held plans dating back to the French mandate associated with architect and planner, Michel Ecochard (Verdeil, 2010), the avenue scores through the centre, linking East and West Beirut through the Ring overpass and tunnels. This circulatory format of arterial routes and bloodied veins recalls the powerful image of the body of Beirut as a living creature with drains and sewers that digest its detritus (Nassib 1992). Rana Eid's feature film and sound essay, *Panoptic* (2017) locates the eyes of the city in the Bourj el Murr, visible from the Ring Bridge, as an unfinished vernacular memorial to the civil war and that plays with the tension of surface modernity and subterranean remnants and remains. Returning to configurations of the disappeared their reanimated traces are only allowed to exist for the screening duration of Ghassan Halwani's captivating documentary *Erased—Ascent of the invisible* (2018) after which they "plunge back into invisibility" still existing "beneath everyday life". That there is an invisible underbelly co-existing with Beirut's dynamic present daily existence is underlined further in *White Noise* where the action is primarily located under the bridge, literally beneath the modernist construction of rapid circulation, and at night when the dangerous, criminal and otherworldly prowl. The Ring Bridge itself creates a dark space with the road passing North to South tracing the old green line of the civil war on the rue de Damas and exits to the bridge slip roads. This positioning at the crossroads of the bridge and the barely sutured scar of Beirut's prolonged division into East and West during the wars combines with the privatised security to play with various conceptual triadic structures. If the dark underbelly points to the Freudian hidden iceberg of idness, then there is also the conceptual triad in the creation of social space outlined by urban theorist, Henri Lefebvre (2009) where the dark underpass requires a wayward instinct of spatial practice to make sense of the perceived space which lies beneath—and distinct—from the conceived intellectual space of the planners. Meanwhile it is Said and the motley crew of nocturnal characters, Abu Rabih and the two qabaday who experience the representational space intuitively and discursively as discussed below.

The ground under the bridge is gravelled and studded with the large concrete pillars which hold up the road, at night the space is orange hued in illumination contrasting with the blue-grey dark of the surrounding city. Said arrives for his shift at the Ring Bridge in a minibus with other guards, he cuts a slim figure with curly hair and an apprehensive air. He already strikes one as an unlikely security guard and vulnerable to the dangers of the city night. (Fig. 2) He is dropped off unceremoniously at the Bridge with his only line of communication a Walkie Talkie connecting him to an older female boss best described as brusque, impatient and mocking. She refers to him by his call number, 45 and when he asks what it is he is supposed to watch, she replies simply "The Bridge" then asks, with irony, if he can see it (Fig. 3). An observational sequence follows as a *tentative d'épuiser* Said: an absurdly brightly lit lorry sounds a melodic horn in rare recognition of his presence. A passing car scores drugs from dealers on mopeds. Fly posters put up an advertisement for a forthcoming show of oriental dance with a female figure scantily clad sitting seductively and then another moped arrives, and two young men spray black paint over the posters to censor the immorality. She later appears to Said in a hallucinatory sequence as he becomes increasingly dissociated from his reality. This is in effect a rupture of the ego with reality under the sway of the id and a libidinous drive also functioning as a protective shield and a preliminary stage of the psychosis which follows (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, 372). Said espies an amorous couple making the most of the secrecy of the dark spaces under the bridge. When his presence is disclosed by the crackling of his walkie talkie, the couple run away with Said hoping that the speed of the young man is not replicated in his imminent sexual activity.

Two major and entwined encounters structure the drama of the film. The first with Abu Rabih as he attempts suicide from the bridge and then the second with the local thugs, qabaday, who delineate their area of control and make it clear that any authority Said might have as a security guard is secondary to theirs. These are important archetypal characters who know and in an absurd way care for each other having some complicity in their respective experiences.

3. Securitisation

White Noise is also a fable on the idiosyncratic and volatile way securitisation works in Beirut. As Mona Fawaz, Mona Harb and Ahmad Gharbieh explain:

Beirut has a fragmented, overlapping, and contested security system where the definition of what constitutes a threat is constantly negotiated and therefore changing, the monopoly of state agencies on security is openly challenged, and the boundaries between the public and private identities of public agents blurred (2012, 174).

They argue further that the improvised securitisation produces city spaces discursively designated by threats and anxieties entrenching segregation along issues of race, class, gender and religion. By mapping the different modalities of security in Beirut they then decipher the threats to which they respond and how the quotidian lives of urban dwellers are affected (Fawaz *et al.*, 2012). In Said's case it is difficult to see what threats he is meant to survey; he is merely instructed to "watch the bridge". Furthermore, the impression is given that his first shift, certainly via the dismissive, cynical boss, is probably destined to be his last. The job does not connote any form of desirable status. There is a tacit understanding that the qabaday rule the roost while the guard is understood as nothing more than a flimsy placeholder for the corporate owners of the space, though no indication is given of any particular company or organisation, such as the municipality, who employs Said. There is no sense of to whom or for whom his security firm reports. It would appear to be something like the privatised security Hawks who work throughout Solidere of which the Ring bridge marks something of a perimeter.

As Fawaz *et al.* demonstrate, the security presence in Beirut can range from concrete barriers, barbed wire, to armed police or soldiers and tanks with corresponding prohibitions on vehicles and photography (2012, 179). A specific building might also employ its own security, which would frequently be supplied by Solidere's subsidiary, Solidere Management Services. These visible forms of securitisation match the growing visibility of protecting neoliberal investments (such as the City of London's ring of steel) and Ghossein, here, I suggest, is deliberately undermining and ironizing it notably by showcasing Said's psychotic episode in the empty streets of façaded Solidere, where it is typically difficult to get permission to film, but also by conspicuous juxtaposition of Said post-episode next to the aspirational words adorning building hoardings on the Place des Martyrs bespeaking the 'suspended now' of Beirut's contemporary condition (see Naeff, 2018).

These contradictory and overlapping security networks with diffuse and unlikely hierarchies make Said the victim when as he is being beaten up by the ruling neighbourhood thugs. When a police siren sounds as a motorbike passes. Said momentarily senses imminent relief, but it is quickly quashed when the policemen checks in with the qabaday, calling him the affectionate 'habibi' and checking he (and not Said) is okay.

4. The madness of Abu Rabih

I drew a tentative line above between the interloping father figure in Ghossein's earlier short film *My Father is Still a Communist* (2011) and the figure of Abu

Rabih. The heart of the dark comedy plays out in this character. He is a much older figure and potentially a former qabaday in his own right, especially as he is encouraged at one point to take out his anger and frustrations on Said. Three times in *White Noise* Abu Rabih jumps off the bridge in an attempt to kill himself in a manifestation of the maxim (misattributed to Einstein) that doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results is insanity. In the first, an extended sequence, Said calls on his walkie talkie to his barely interested boss and checks with the slumped body on the floor. Abu Rabih gets up uninjured, puts his teeth back in and with great annoyance at his survival starts to rant and rave about everything he hates: his life, the country and he walks off still shouting. Said reports that "the suicidal guy got up and walked off" (Fig. 4) By the time there is another attempt, Said has encountered the local tough guys who are dictating their terms, as he jumps, the tough men help him up, refer to him by his name and tell him he needs to be careful and stop jumping because he risks hurting someone someday. They then encourage him to take out his anger (and he does) on hapless Said. By the third and final time, it has become a marginal incident, but there is a beautiful juxtaposition between the two pillars of the collaborative street art "Before I die, I want Lebanon to" in English on one pillar and in Arabic on another as Abu Rabih jumps over the edge of the bridge to the left. Abu Rabih is frustrated by the city—and the state—not even fulfilling his desire to die (Fig. 5). The collaborative art is designed to invite passers-by to write in their hopes and desires. Its very affective influence moved Nadine Sinno to tears as she writes in her book on street art and graffiti, "reading the handwritten messages of fellow Lebanese who cared—and dared—to stop, to share their thoughts and emotions, and to "reinvent hope", in seriousness or in jest" (2024, 233-4). Yet, it becomes in *White Noise* a humorous and absurd juxtaposition to Abu Rabih's third suicide attempt: he has become so infused with the city's urbicidal impulse he is similarly unable to die. These moments are also darkly funny. When watching the film for the first time with a largely Lebanese audience at a screening in London there were huge laughs at Abu Rabih and indeed several people recounted meeting a similar sort of character. It is testament then to Ghossein's keen observational humour and a gaze that for all that remains affectionate.

But it is useful to consider the character as a clinical case for one moment. Suicidal thoughts frequently arise through a complex of loneliness, isolation and despair compounded by a sense of entrapment which pushes this through to ideation and potential action (*passage à l'acte*). While there can be mental illness, it is also a response to systemic issues resulting from the effects of discrimination, socio-economic inequality, debt: it becomes a definitive means of stopping intolerable

pain. In the suicide prevention helpline where I volunteer, we talk about suicide as a long-term solution to a short-term problem (Samaritans, 2025). While therapeutic methods vary, systemic methods that use open questioning, active listening will frequently open-up psychic space for alternative ways to ease the pain. (Markham, *et al.*, 2020). Typically, in the aftermath of an attempt where there is hospitalisation therapeutic interventions seek to discover a suicide narrative: the background story and circumstances prior to the attempt. This might be entirely individual or as is more frequently the case according to Valach *et al.* (2006) part of a larger social concept understood as a style of reactions to problematic situations, such as those mentioned above (652). They describe suicide attempt narratives as having a "career", typically a long-standing relationship, a 'project', some dysfunctional aspect of that relationship or an event, and an 'action', the steps taken to end one's life (653-5). The only discernible relationship career that can be identified for Abu Rabih is his relationship with Lebanon, although his name suggests he is a father, his project is fury at the country and the action is to jump from the bridge. His anger is merely reinforced on survival as he picks himself up repeatedly uninjured. There is only some respite in the semi-therapeutic gesture offered to him by the thugs to take out his pain on Said by beating him and there is in this some brief relief.

Zizek, in an chapter titled "Le Suicide et ses vicissitudes", contrasts cases of suicide that can be given some sort of explanation, social or pathological, with that of the reflexive modernist case of a purely existential act "le résultat d'une décision pure, irréductible à toute souffrance objective ou pathologie psychique" (2010, 215). Reformulating Lacan, he argues that the absence of any pure tragedy makes the modern condition all the more terrifying. Furthermore, within this absence, there is a horror beyond the possibility of tragedy, a turn to elements that are comic or absurd, parody or imitation becomes the sole possible representation because radical horror is beyond sublimation (216). This correlates to the contrary and absurd epistemological terrain that parallels the darkest humour. He later defines three types of suicide: first, as an act which bears witness to a particular message such as political protest; second, a psychic crisis and finally a symbolic form where *le réseau symbolique qui définit l'identité du sujet est lui-même effacé* (226). This final description is one of pure dejection "un déchet, un grain de poussière dans l'œil, *un presque-rien*" (226). Abu Rabih is a mixture of the first, to jump from such a notorious part of the city given its history is a political gesture and third, where arguably and abjectly, the city will not even offer up its collaboration in his suicide. Therein is the humor, the angry frustration of the man broken repeatedly by life in Lebanon and a Beirut that refuses to let him die, like the tragicomedy of Estragon and Vladimir as they look to the tree in their interminable wait for Godot.

Jalal Toufic in his essay on Vampires and the undead—and perhaps Abu Rabih, like the father figure in Ghossein's earlier film, is a representation of this undead—draws a parallel between the aphoristic and the suicidal (2003, 15), in the concision of the act, the threshold crossed and the discontinuous jump. Furthermore, Ghossein's experiments with the concept of jump cuts in a short installation film entitled "A letter for my mother: Jump Cuts" plays on the cinematic technique where different angles of the same scene are shot discontinuously and then edited as either spatial and temporal jump cuts giving false continuity (Ghosssein, 2011). Filmed rapidly in response to the 2006 war and in reaction to the destruction of his family home, the project asks the same question: where were you when the war took place in the South of Lebanon? over different shots of the same place. The voice is a continuation in the absence of an image that has been amputated in and by the disaster (2011). Is the repetition of the jump here as a failure, an amputated attempt, also a means of asking: where were you? If the suicidal act in the first formulation outlined by Zizek is a call to witness, the humour here, I suggest overlays the very serious question of witnessing Beirut's traumatising and systemically alienating past and present.

5 Beirut Madhouse: Ring-induced psychosis

Beirut's nocturnal underworld forms a strong parallel with Foucault's kinships in the madhouse (as places of exclusion) in that they both 'group together with the mad, sufferers of venereal diseases, libertines, and innumerable major or petty criminals' bringing about what he terms an 'obscure assimilation' and importantly a longstanding (and remaining) association between 'madness and moral and social guilt' (Foucault 1987: 69). The absurdity of the unofficial power network in which Said as the guard is himself the victim without any authority, he remains at the mercy of the city and its vicissitudes.

As Said awakes from his preliminary delusion, he returns to the tough guys in an attempt to reassert his position with inevitable results. In the fracas, one of the qabaday drops a flick knife and once they leave on their moped, Said picks it up. As he runs off, his ego ruptures with reality, leaving it under the sway of the id in the second stage of psychotic delusion. He is filmed running into and through Solidere, the façaded rebuilt central district of Beirut so rarely visited by its citizens. Holding his knife and passing the shuttered designer shops, the camera shakes wildly, violently visualising the fracture, as we are invited into Said's madness (Fig. 6). As dawn begins to break, the episode ends too and he comes to his senses, witnesses himself holding the knife and throws it away into the flower bed. This coming back to personhood takes place as he walks back towards the bridge through the Place des Martyrs. We see him witnessing first—

alongside an aspirational building hoarding which writes of the "New Beirut: Cosmopolitan and Expressive"—looking surprised and quizzical (Fig. 7). While it is unclear at first if this is residual madness, the closing shot shows the bridge has vanished and his walkie talkie just makes residual white noise as even the disembodied female voice has disappeared (Fig. 8).

There is then in Beirut a deliberate space of madness: Said's urban-induced madness ceases with the destruction of the bridge and what seems an unimaginable prospect. It takes away with it the traces of accelerated modernity, the violence of the civil war and the lived city finally triumphs over the planned one and the fusion of protagonist and city dissolves.

Conclusion

Dark humour has a rich history in cultural production from Lebanon and the region, Elia Suleiman's films of Palestine, Hady Zaccak's stridently political but also amusing fable which tells the history of Lebanon through the Mercedes Ponton (Marcades, 2011) and film archive alongside Ghossein's work here, all explore the absurdity of the most difficult experiences: occupation, violence, the traces of civil war. This is done with an affiliative yet dark humour; an affectionate yet sharp irony providing a space for relief and grief to be discharged if only briefly. There is a drama therapy technique known as sociodrama, which "may be simply defined as a group method in which common experiences are shared in action. It is the application of psychodrama techniques to social situations in the community" (Kellerman 2007, 16). I suggest that in *White Noise* and the turn to dark humour, Ghossein harnesses the ability of this cultural work to express continuing legacies of violence. In the representation of the vicissitudes of Beirut, its complicated and complexing strategies of security and the hapless personalities that become caught up in them are showcased. I also suggest that the articulation of jump cuts across multiple temporalities and spatialities offers a therapeutic potential of creativity and solidarity in the face of the most challenging circumstances. Resisting the unhelpful trope of resilience, indeed Abu Rabih literally embodies its futility as his body is too resilient to die; dark humour as adaptive cynicism and irony expands the epistemic domain to access the absurd, the confusing and the complex as resistant to despair.

Notes

[1] Embrace caveats these statistics somewhat. The number of registered suicides was 168 but it is not entirely clear if the significant increase is due to better reporting methods. The report notes that suicide is habitually underreported both by families and communities and there was a significant risk factor in the pervasive unethical reporting of suicide cases in the press.

[2] Photographer, Catherine Cattaruzza's "Beneath my skin, my home" (2018) installation at the AUBMC combines an MRI of a venous network and a map of Beirut.

[3] The Bridge was a significant location of protest and events during the 2019 revolution where it was furnished as an outdoor apartment reclaiming it from cars into a public forum and listing it on Air BnB. For a comprehensive student-led project on the uprisings, see: https://lebanonunsettled.org/performative-mapping

Figures

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4


Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

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